

Remembering Appa

On late Malikarjun Mansur's ninetieth birth anniversary, his son and musical heir Rajshekhar Mansur shares a few special memories.

Photo Courtesy **SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI**

MY father was chatty with his contemporaries and particularly friendly with Pandit Bhimsen. Whenever they were together they would break into Kannada. The two would discuss mundane matters removed from the music world and naturally prefer to use the language that bound them.

The other important person in his life was Gangubai. She was like a sister to him. Often they shared the same platform and whenever they were together they would eat lunch and dinner at the same hotel. One of Gangubai's oft repeated warnings to my father was, "Anna don't go to the USA. The organisers will swindle you", recalling a sad experience that she had faced and despite him trying to convince her otherwise, remained adamant about **Am** belief.

Beyond the classical tradition, my father had very little knowledge of the developments in the Indian music scene, particularly in the realm of film music. Once the playback star Mahendar Kapoor came to our native Dharwar to pay his respects to appa. Father was completely disinterested unlike us children who stood agog and tense awaiting the arrival of the great celebrity. Only when Kapoor touched his feet and shared the fact that he was

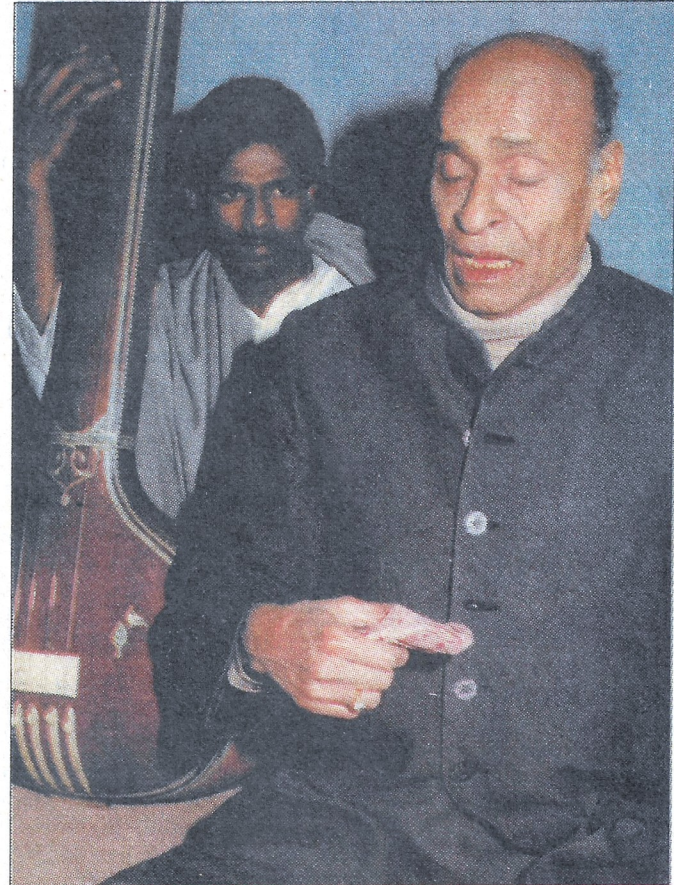
trained in the classical norm, did the barriers crumble. Appa blurted out to his visitor, "accha aapne mera gana suna hai?" in childish glee.

But these were occasional manifestations of pride and my father was always known for his complete humility, gracing any audience that invited him. Even when Canara Bank opened its hundredth branch, at a remote village, Basava, the birthplace of the saint Basavanna, he chose to regale an audience of farmers with the intricacies of his voice.

I became his musical heir, by accident actually. I was taken along on an important concert tour when the his chosen disciple Siddharam Jambal, from Hubli was unable to accompany him. I was there only to play the resonating strings of the background tanpura and that is how he began to show interest in me. Being his son was not the criteria at all.

In his own case too, appa had been bestowed the gift of training under the Alladiya tutelage quite spontaneously. It happened that his friend Vishnu Pant Pagnis (the film actor who starred in the hit 'Sant Tularam') was a jeweler by profession and his shop was the meeting place of a number of musicians.

The late Ustad Manji Khan Sahib happened to visit the shop and the conversation veered to my father. And when his latest



Malikarjun Mansur at his last recording at the Sangeet Natak Akademi

record was played, Manji Khan Sahib immediately agreed to teach him.

In the 30s and 40s my father sat on stage attired in a zaree trimmed pagaree and sherwani and in the later concerts, his frail form was seen on stage clad

in home spun khadi kurta and all the time he sang to his art and his religion. What a tradition he was - my father, Pandit Malikarjun Mansur.

— As told to
SHUBRA MAJUMDAR